

Subject: **Gold King Mine Release - Regional Update #8**

Date: **17 August 2015**

Background

The Gold King Mine near Silverton, Colorado has had a continuous discharge of acidic mine drainage that is a historic contributor of lead, arsenic, zinc, copper, and cadmium into the Cement Creek drainage of the Animas River watershed. On August 5, 2015, an estimated 3 million gallons of mine wastewater released into the upper portions of Cement Creek, and into the Animas River.

Executive Summary

- New Mexico announced its determination that drinking water systems and recreational activity along the Animas and San Juan rivers can resume based on water quality sampling results collected by both New Mexico Environment Department and the EPA.
- EPA Region 9 is focused on assessing the impacts of the release along a stretch of the San Juan River extending from Farmington, NM, to Mexican Hat, UT, and into Lake Powell
- EPA will continue to sample, analyze, and make data available to support local decision makers moving forward to allow them to make the best informed decisions.
- EPA Region 9 continues to provide an alternative water supply and hay to the Navajo Tribal Utility Agency (NTUA) for agriculture and livestock
- EPA Region 9 continues to coordinate with representatives from the Navajo Nation, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), the States of AZ, Utah, NM, and federal agencies Bureau of Reclamation, the National Park Service, and US Geological Survey
- **Press Release from the City of Durango announced that the City had resumed pumping raw water for water drinking water treatment and distribution after independent sampling results supported such a decision.**

Unless specified otherwise all dates & times are in Pacific Daylight Time (PDT). For previous information please see the Documents Section of the field operations website: www.epaossc.org/R9_SanJuanRiverResponse

Current Actions

- **EPA will release data today for water samples collected on August 12.** On 8/15 EPA released additional water quality data from Aug. 7 to Aug. 11, 2015, on the San Juan River between Farmington and Shiprock, New Mexico. The August 7th data was collected for baseline purposes to understand river conditions at the Hogback monitoring location, prior to the impact of the upstream contaminants from the Gold King Mine release. To assess the impacts of the release at the Gold King Mine, water quality samples were collected at four locations for 24 metals. Each surface water sample was analyzed for metals including arsenic, cadmium, lead and mercury. Due to the highly variable conditions typical of this segment of the river, additional testing will be conducted, and we continue to work closely with the Navajo Nation EPA on assessing drinking water, agriculture, livestock, and other critical water needs. R9 Data can be found here: <http://www2.epa.gov/goldkingmine/gold-king-mine-data-august-15-2015>
- R9 continues surface water and sediment sampling and monitoring (pH, conductivity, turbidity) along the San Juan River in the Navajo Nation at 11 monitoring sites.
- On 8/15 surface water, bottom water samples and sediment samples were collected at six locations on the San Juan Arm in Lake Powell. This included sample locations at what is believed to be the San Juan River inflow point into Lake Powell between Zahn Bay and Great Bend as well as the "plunge" area just east of Great Bend where river water plunges below the lake water. Both of these were deemed critical locations based on conversations with technical experts from various agencies. EPA was greatly assisted by NPS Glen Canyon who provided all logistical support including a 46 and a 26 foot vessel and three personnel. On Sunday 8/16, the sampling team **collected** samples from the main stem of Lake Powell

between Dangling Rope and the Glen Canyon Dam. **The USGS has invited EPA to participate in a 12-day program to sample the Lake Powell Basin for mercury and other heavy metals as needed. A START contractor will be provided for this effort.**

- NTUA has identified 13 locations for tankage for EPA to distribute water for agriculture and livestock use. EPA continues providing over 16,000 gallons of non-potable water per day to each of these locations. **NTUA is working on putting their water distribution lines back online so that delivery of water can be discontinued.**
- EPA continues to provide hay/alfalfa bales to Navajo Nation chapter locations for livestock needs Public meetings and outreach.
- R9 Community Involvement Coordinators (CIC) continue to provide outstanding public outreach and communication across the Navajo Nation. They continue to hold public meetings with Chapter Houses.
- EPA continues coordinating field response efforts with Navajo Nation through an EPA representative in Windowrock, NM
- **On 8/16 meetings were held at the Mexican Water Chapter (25 in attendance) and the Guudiah Chapter (40 in attendance).**
- **No meetings are scheduled for today. They will resume 8/18 at the Beclabito Chapter.**
- Region 6, 8, 9 continue to hold joint Regional Response Team calls with State and Federal Agencies for situational updates.

Personnel On-Site

6 R9 OSCs

1 R10 OSC

1 R9 PIO

5 R9 CIC

2 R9 LNC/LNO

1 R9 Laboratory

8 USCG PST

Key Issues

- Utah has requested historical water quality data from Navajo Nation in the San Juan River
- On 8/14 the State of Utah lifted their advisories for Utah Crop Irrigation and Livestock Watering – see link: [State of Utah Lifts Advisories for Utah Crop Irrigation and Livestock Watering](#)
- The Director of the State of Utah Division of Water Quality, Utah Department of Environmental Quality, would like to speak to someone at EPA regarding the need to collaborate on San Juan River sampling data and related Agency water quality monitoring information.
- What agency is, or will be willing, to make a definitive statement regarding the water quality of Lake Powell... specifically if and when it might be safe for drinking and for recreation contact.
- **On 8/14 Press Release from the City of Durango announced that the City had resumed pumping raw water for water drinking water treatment and distribution after independent sampling results supported such a decision.**
- **On 8/14 the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) lifted the ban on the use of private domestic water wells.**